

Accession Number: A/11

Classification:

Date: 24 May 1974

Interview with: Cora Watson and Anna Watson

Interview by: S.F. Patton

Observations: Interview held in private home. Initially interview was to be of Cora Watson, but within 40 minutes the interview was of that of Anna Watson. Anna is Cora's daughter. Due to Cora Watson's age her memory was good, and Miss Watson obliged me by supplementing and correcting her mother's responses. Anna Watson is a retired school teacher

1. Q. Name

A. Cora L. Watson. I'm quite old

2 Q. What is your birthdate

A. My mother died when I was quite young. I was born and raised in the South. I couldn't go to school until I was six years old, that was the rule in the South. I just count my age from when I remember going to school

3 Q. What did you calculate

A. I'm 93. My birthday is in June

4 Q. Where were you born

A. South Carolina, Abbeyville County. I was raised in Greenwood.

5 Q. Did you have any brothers and/ or sisters

A. My sister and brother were both older than me. My mother I faintly remember. She gave me to my cousin

6 Q. When did you come to Evanston

A. 1914

7 Q. Did you come alone

A. No I had a lot of relatives in South Carolina. Some

of them went to New York; some went to Evanston. They came back to visit in South Carolina and told us how much better these places were than in South Carolina. White and Coloured could go to the same schools, they said. In South Carolina the white schools ran longer

I was grown, married and had children then. I took my two oldest children. I had relatives living in Chicago. I said if White and Coloured can go to same school that's for me. I had four children. My two oldest children, were with me; I had five children. I brought my two oldest children with me. My three youngest I left with my cousin who reared me. The oldest two; this one (gesturing toward Anna) and the other daughter. I didn't want to live in a large city and they told me about Evanston. That was in 1914. I got a job in Evanston

Greenwood, that's where we were living when we came here. We had a house there, we were living quite well there; that is because I worked all the time.

A group of Whites from New York felt for Coloureds. They opened up a school for Negroes in Greenwood, S.C. They brought their own teachers who were White. It was the only school for Negroes right after Freedom of the slaves. We did have to pay something; but it was just what you could pay. Oldest child was old enough to go to the school. The faculty was White

I came here in 1914

8 Q. Where did you live in Evanston

A. Anna: The three of us came. We lived in a room on 1619 Ashland. I stayed with a cousin in Chicago. My brother and two sisters were with my father. We lived for one year in a flat, 1711 Dodge. All the family lived 1853 East Railroad Ave. Then we were back on the west side, 1741 Dodge. After that 1824 Emerson. Mother then decided to buy. My father was a carpenter. In 1919 we moved here, in this house on Garnett. We sold the home in South Carolina

Cora: I sold the home in Greenville. We were the first coloured to live here. Actually we were the second coloured living on the street. The first coloured moved; they didn't stay long. The Whites didn't want them here. We moved here in 1919. We've been here for fifty years

They couldn't keep us from moving in. This sign on the street: "for Sale", the Whites had a house for sale. I saw it often. When I would get off at Foster and the "L" coming from Chicago. I decided I would just ask, out of curiosity. They tried to get a White buyer, but the family said they would sell to anyone if they had half the money down

I went back to Greenwood and sold the house to get the money for a down payment. The Whites didn't want coloured

I worked from Monday morning to Friday evening. Evanston was very small

9 Q. Where in Evanston did you work

A. I had a job for wealthy, wealthy people. I don't like to say what I did. I did laundry work; I'd wash and iron. That's what I did in Greenwood

10 Q. Do you remember the family name

A. I can't think of the name now. It'll come to me. They owned Marshall Fields; they were part of it. They were millionaires.

Higinbotham was the name of the people. Marshall Field's grandson is now in California. Mr. Higginbotham was son or grandson of Marshall Field. I can't remember

11 Q. Where did family live in Evanston

A. I worked for the grandchildren of Marshall Field. This boy and his wife visited us from California last year. He never did any work; he couldn't manage the store

12 Q. How many hours a day did you work, eight

A. Oh you were supposed to; sometimes it was more than that. They would have heavy work sent out. I would wash the wearing clothes

13 Q. How much would you earn

A. I was working by the day

14 Q. How much money did you earn

A. You know that's been over fifty years ago. Whatever the price, we'd get clothes

Anna: \$4 a day

15 Q. How many days a week did you work

A. Five days. I would be night when I got home

Anna: My mother was very methodical. We would walk to school, my mother would walk to work. My dad bought my mother a bicycle but she would not ride it

16 Q. Were there any cab companies then

A. I walked back and forth to work

Anna: There was the Butler livery service. We used the cabs for emergencies. We could not afford cabs

17 Q. Did you have any days off

A. You called it "days work." Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday I washed and iron. Friday I cleaned the nursery where the children played. I was paid by the week. I was paid at the end of the week

18 Q. Did the families feed you

A. We had breakfast and lunch there. I was supposed to work at 8:00 a.m. They kept three girls in the house

Anna: There was a cook, and a waitress, one upstairs and downstairs.

The cook would bring food downstairs at 11:00---a snack. I would come upstairs to the dining room. The help had a dining room upstairs to eat. We ate at 12:00

Anna: We did the marketing and cooking ourselves

19 Q. How many people were working at the families home

A. Anna: There was the yardman who stoked the furnaces. The nursemaid, cook, upstairs girl who waited on table, dusted and made the beds. There were five without the laundress

20 Q. What was the family name

A. Anna: Higinbotham (a newspaper clipping was shown in order to spell name correctly)

21 Q. Did any of the help stay at home

A. Anna: The houseman didn't stay. There was a German nurse, a Swedish cook. They lived on the third floor. The two maids stayed

22 Q. They employed White and Black

A. Anna: She was the first employed. They liked my mother

23 Q. For this family the first employed Negro

A. Yes. They called me Mrs Watson, everyone else they called by the first name. They liked me

Anna: There weren't many Negroes living in Evanston

then. They owned property then. My cousin's family was the first to live in south Evanston. The influx of Negroes came after W.W.I. There was a restriction on immigrant labour then. That's when we get a great influx of Negroes from the South

While I was at Northwestern it was terribly prejudiced. A professor called this the "Little South." You couldn't eat at the restaurants. Walgreens was the only place we could eat, it was really not in Evanston. There was one movie house we could attend, although they really did not want us. We had to sit in a special section of the theatre

There were very rich white families in Evanston then. There were thirty retired millionaires here at one time. They did not want to make it too attractive for Negroes

24 Q. Some of the families brought Negroes with them

A. Anna: Yes some did. Tarkey's mother came up with Dean Black's family. A lot of them brought their own if they liked their servants

For Negroes, the North appeared attractive; the pay and work was better. But it had its prejudices like the South. I could not teach in North Shore schools. I could not swim in Northwestern's pool

25 Q. When did you finish school

A. Anna: 1926. Dr. Hill was in pre-Med at N.U.; neither she and another girl and another from Chicago could swim at Northwestern. This was before I couldn't swim in the pool. There was this new physical education teacher from Texas who stopped me from swimming. At first she didn't know I was Negro, because of my light colour.

26 Q. What type of work were Blacks doing then

A. Anna: Domestic. Haverhurst described Evanston a "Dormitory Town" There was no industry here then. There's just light industry now.

27 Q. Were there any job benefits then

A. Anna: No not until 1930's

28 Q. Prior to W.W.II domestic labour predominantly existed in Evanston

A. Anna: I had to go South to teach. I taught in Texas where I taught French. Evanston gradually improved. It was

not until W.W.II, they quit working in the domestic situations, they then worked in factories. A lot still worked in homes

Some of the families would take care of you. They would pay for medical care when you needed it; and give money when you left--retired.

Defense work started during the War; people would get jobs at that.

29 Q. Most of the jobs were outside Evanston

A. Anna: Yes. There were factories and the Veterans hospital. Then of course they restricted housing after W.W.II Now, they live all over Evanston again.

Around the 1930's, I just got back from the South, I started social work study at University of Chicago. Evanston was my field so I found out a lot about Evanston

30 Q. Just before and during the Crash, Negroes were on relief

A. Anna: During the '30's yes. Some of the agency people would say the reason Negroes were short of money because they (Agency) overlooked the fact that Negroes needed money for "bootlegging"---liquour. The agency said they had not calculated the right amount of money

31 Q. During the Depression, a lot of people lost jobs

A. Yes. The factories closed; people were out of work

32 Q. Did it seem as severe in Evanston

A. No, it didn't, have the same impact. No. There were no factories in Evanston. Negroes didn't have that much to lose

My mother was working then. She kept students here when I was a senior at N.U. They didn't allow Negroes in the dormitories, except the Garrett hall for men who were in Theology Seminary. While my sister was in college, my mother took more students. The woman down the street would cook.

33 Q. How much was board

A. I can't remember. You know you could feed a family for a dollar a day.

34 Q. When did your husband come here

A. August 1914

35 Q. What's his name

A. Moses

36 Q. What work did he do

A. He was a carpenter. He built on this block

37 Q. Was he a carpenter all his life

A. He worked that all the time, once he worked for the city a little while

38 Q. Did he have more than one job at one time

A. Anna: He first started as a contractor, I don't know what happened to that. Ray King, Collier and he came here around the same time, they would help each other out. My father did repair work. He also built houses from the ground up

There is a home for women--the North Shore Community House. The Iroquois Lew Incorp. sold the house. I bought it. It houses nine women now. My mother is the only living charter member of the Iroquois

39 Q. Was it a political club

A. No it was a home for working girls. A civil club

40 Q. Why did they choose an Indian name

A. Dr. Penn's wife was one of the founders. There was Mrs Rouse---I think it was her idea

41 Q. Did you have to wear any type of dress when you worked

A. No, not me. The others did

42 Q. Were there any Negro Businesses

A. Anna: Yes There was Mason's Restaurant on Davis; that were dentist and doctors offices. A man further east, near the North Shore Hotel had a restaurant for just White clientele. He employed Negro university students

There was a real estate man. He would Block-bust too!

43 Q. A Black owned the restaurant

A. Anna: Jones, oh yes

44 Q. Just white patrons

A. Just white. We could not afford it and we did not eat out then.

45 Q. Before 1929

A. Anna: Oh yes. They were there when we came. We could do anything then

46 Q. Did you ever hear of the Negro Business League

A. I heard of it, but I can't remember what it did. I was very active. I organized Negro club here and listed them in a directory. I can not remember the name of it

47 Q. What are some other things you did

A. I don't remember...let's see I was affiliated with a church...

Anna: Women's Missionary Society. You always did church work. The Iroquois Club belonged to the Chicago North District Assoc. She gave \$ 6000 to the Y.W.C.A. here. She gave quite a bit to Federated Clubs, both city and state. She got the Iroquois Club declared as a non-profit organization. Sometimes the club had as many as 16 girls living there. I have 9 now. She gave \$5000 for Africa. Fred Jourdan, Bishop of the church, needed money for Monrovia

48 Q. Was this recently

A. Anna: Within 2 or 3 years

49 Q. What church

A. A.M.E. Church

50 Q. Anna, what is your birthdate

A. 1903 October 30

(meanwhile Cora showed me a publication with her photograph. Fourth Episcopal District. Womens Missionary Society.

51 Q. What were the large Negro families here

A. Butler, Childs, Scott family. The Outlaws were a big family

